

A Visit to Whale Island

F. Still

Motuhora, or Whale Island, is a small volcanic island lying in the Bay of Plenty about six miles north-north-west of Whakatane. It is approximately one and a-half miles long by half a mile wide, and rises to over eleven hundred feet above sea-level. As we approached the island in December of last year pohutukawas came into prominence ringing the coast and along the western slope of the central Sulphur Valley. The only other tree recognised from the launch was an occasional ngaio on the eastern tip of the island.

Stunted kanuka (*Leptospermum ericoides*) fringes the eastern side of Sulphur Valley but attains tree form further up the 1175-foot hill, to which its growth is limited. Rushes are abundant on the island and toetoe-rautahi (*Carex ternaria*) is plentiful in most situations.

A pohutukawa growing at about 800 feet above sea-level, facing west, had a prolific growth of flowers that hid all foliage and resembled a massive ball of fire. At about 900 feet two shrubs of ongaonga (*Urtica ferox*) were seen, and from there upwards this nettle increased in abundance, reaching a maximum just east of the trig, where it was growing under mahoe and ngaio trees. In this area two juvenile plants of karamu (*Coprosma lucida*) were growing as epiphytes on mahoe. A mature karamu was not seen. Some aka (*Metrosideros perforata*), hound's tongue (*Polypodium diversifolium*), *Asplenium flaccidum* and *Pyrrosia serpens* were also seen in this piece of bush. Water-fern (*Histiopteris incisa*) was growing in moderate amounts in most places. The great number of goats on the island have kept the usual plant life well in check and their depredations can be seen everywhere.

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